

# Scripture

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## *THE APOLOGETIC ASPECT OF ACTS 2:1-13*

The second chapter of Acts narrates the descent of the Holy Ghost. It is a complex and strange story, and the alignment of the facts and their interpretation presents several problems. For one thing, the stupendous event itself of the descent of the Holy Ghost is dealt with in three verses, not even fifty words all told. Much more is made of the direct consequences: the reaction among the people outside, even to the detail of enumerating eighteen different groups; the lengthy explanation of the event, given by St Peter, embodying the longest quotation from the Old Testament in Acts; eventually the mass-conversion consequent on St Peter's address. Then there are the various problems such as the 'speaking in strange tongues' even before the crowds had gathered; or the fact that each of the pilgrims heard the Apostles 'talking his own native tongue' (v. 8), yet seemed to know that they were 'Galileans speaking' (v. 7). Again, that St Peter should be concerned more with answering those 'who said, mockingly, they have had their fill of new wine' (v. 13) rather than with discussing the miracle of the languages for those 'who asked one another, What can this mean?' (v. 12). Or again, what are these 'other tongues'? Just foreign languages or perhaps strange expressions? And apart from these difficulties, to which could be added the 'strong wind blowing' (v. 2), 'the tongues of fire' (v. 3), there is the further complication that we are faced with a speech made by St Peter, but very much epitomised by St Luke ('he used many more words besides,' v. 40), and used by him for attaining the end for which he wrote his Acts. Have we to invoke Petrine theology in order to understand the meaning of Acts 2, or have we to interpret the address in the light of St Luke's aims?

### I

In order to understand Acts 2 properly, and to give a satisfactory answer to these and other difficulties, it is good to recall a few points. First of all, it is generally agreed that St Luke does not alter any quota-

tions substantially. We do not here mean the more than forty quotations or references in his Gospel and the still greater number in Acts, taken from the Old Testament, but words, spoken by his contemporaries, e.g. the Magnificat, Benedictus, Nunc dimittis, the speeches of St Peter, St Paul and St Stephen in Acts. Secondly, St John and St Paul are original, in the sense that they develop ideas or interpret thoughts which are only latent in the Synoptics.<sup>1</sup> St Peter is not. He depends for the most part on what he has read or heard, whether that source be St Paul or the Old Testament. Not only are his ideas on the Christian Faith clothed in Hebrew words and forms, but they also depict Christianity as the true Israel, keeping and guarding the privileges of the flesh and the promise.<sup>2</sup> If then St Luke does not change these words or ideas substantially, we have for a starting-point of our exegesis St Peter's thoughts on the Church, in a framework constructed by St Luke. The one is as important as the other. Now, it is certainly part of St Peter's teaching that the economy of salvation will be realised in periods, known to the Father (1 Pet. 1:1-2, 4-5), a gradual realisation in time, until the whole of the universe will be transformed into 'a new heaven and a new earth to look forward to' (2 Pet. 3:13). This doctrine of St Peter is used to the full by St Luke, in order to emphasise the theme of his Acts. The universal realisation of God's plans in time (Acts 3:25-6) is worked by the Holy Ghost (1 Pet. 1:2; 3:17-19; 4:14). But, whereas St Peter would seem to be satisfied with focusing the attention more analytically on the New Israel, sprung from 'the precious blood of Christ' (1 Pet. 1:19), constituting a universal 'brotherhood' (1 Pet. 5:9), 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people God means to have for himself' (1 Pet. 2:9), 'God's own household' (1 Pet. 4:17), 'a spiritual house' (1 Pet. 2:5), whose 'chief stone at the corner' (Acts 4:11) is Christ, St Luke, more synthetically, integrates these ideas into the function of the Church as such. St Luke in Acts is not so much concerned with sundry aspects of the Church as the expression of the eschatological reality; his concern is the eschatological reality as such. This point is absolutely basic for the understanding of Acts. And its headlines are illustrated in the second chapter. Thirdly, why should it have been necessary for St Luke to add Acts to his Gospel? His Gospel explains to Theophilus the mercies of our Redeemer; in Acts he shows that this work of salvation is continued, and that the Holy Ghost makes it bear fruit. 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and you will receive strength from him; you are to be my witnesses in Jerusalem and throughout Judea, in Samaria, yes, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8). But why this

<sup>1</sup> G. Thijs, *De leer van den H. Petrus*, Bruges 1946, p. 11

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 23

treatise on the history of the early Church? A truth does not become truer because it is shown to work in practice. The synoptic Gospels, and for that matter the last Gospel as well, seem to have an unsatisfactory ending. All of them finish up with the story of the empty grave and a series of apparitions. Christ, then, had given the final proof that he was the divine legate. Was that the end? 'For ourselves, we had hoped that it was he who was to deliver Israel; but now, to crown it all, today is the third day since it befell' (Luke 24:21).

Christ may have, and indeed had, convinced the Apostles that he was the divine legate. But that had not yet given them a deep enough insight into the nature of his mission after his death. The Apostles had not at all understood what was meant by the Kingdom to come. They were still steeped in the Old Testament idea of the 'Day of Yahweh,' 'That Day' or 'The Day.' For them the 'Day of Yahweh' was the chronologically indifferenced 'now.' The disciples had asked him about the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of time in one breath (Matt. 24:3). They believed in the eschatological reality, but were not aware of its depth. The knowledge of that reality had prompted them to ask Christ just before his ascension: 'Lord, dost thou mean to restore the dominion to Israel here and now?' (Acts 1:6). Such a question, despite the fact that 'throughout the course of forty days he had been appearing to them, and telling them about the Kingdom of God' (Acts 1:3) 'and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem' (Luke 24:47), shows that they had evidently failed to grasp where the Kingdom came in, and how it could come about. For the Day of Yahweh was there, now! And yet, Christ had told them that the Kingdom was to be preached to the ends of the earth (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:17; Acts 1:8). But it is St Luke alone who mentions that their minds needed enlightenment on that point (Luke 24:47). In other words, it is not so much their faith in Jesus that needed strengthening, it was their Old Testament concept of the Day of the Lord that needed correcting. And that is why St Luke wrote his Acts: to prove that the eschatological era had indeed come, but that it was not just a moment of time. It was to be an indefinite period. It would mean readjusting the notion not only of the Day of the Lord, but also of Israel's place in the economy of salvation, Israel's election. Of course, we know now that that is tantamount to explaining the true nature of the Church, not so much the Church as a monarchal society, although that aspect must also enter, but rather the Church as the continuation of Christ's mission, indeed of Christ himself.

The idea of Israel's election had always been prevalent in the Old Testament. From childhood on, the Jew had been made familiar with the doctrine of Yahweh's intervention in history for the sake of His elect, of His punishing justice for the sake of protecting His elect. The Israelite had always gloried in being Yahweh's 'peculiar property' (Ex. 19:5), and the bearers of revelation and messianism. But they had also realised that eventually only a 'remnant' would form the Kingdom of the Messias. That final transformation would take place on the awful Day of Yahweh. On that day the 'remnant' would be placed at the head of all nations, assimilate them and become the Messianic Kingdom, the spiritual Israel. The Day of Yahweh, then, was all-important. However, neither pre- nor post-exilic prophets had ever laid bare the full meaning of 'that day.'<sup>1</sup> It was St Luke who, after finishing his Gospel, and taught by St Paul and by the experience gathered from long years of oral instruction, set himself the task of explaining that the Day of Yahweh was co-extensive with the universal mission of the Kingdom. However, St Luke's exposé is not confined to the logical conclusions drawn from, and the authoritative interpretations of, the Founder's own doctrines; it is, of course, all that. But not in the way of a Pauline epistle or of an historical essay, composed to prove his assertions. It is rather the other way about; historical facts are aligned in such a way that they have not only a value in themselves, but also a transcendent value as signs. And as such they contain in themselves all the arguments for proving a thesis, which need not be formally expressed. In that sense, St Luke is a true disciple of the Old Testament authors of the historical books. But then, it is not only the words that matter, the whole build-up has to be taken into consideration. We have to pay great attention to the apologetic aspect.

## II

The second chapter of Acts has three main themes, dealing with three characteristic qualities of the Kingdom of God, which link up with three Old Testament doctrines, but which had been largely misinterpreted, even by Christ's closest friends; they are the outpouring of the Spirit, the Apostles' testimony in the strength of that Spirit and its universalism. This theological lesson is taught in such a way that from the array of many facts is distilled both a correction of possibly mistaken Old Testament notions, and their true interpretation. The Old Testament had been abundantly clear on the fact that the Spirit of Yahweh would dominate the eschatological era.

<sup>1</sup> W. K. Grossouw, *Bijbelse Vroomheid*, Utrecht 1955, pp. 181-2

The commencement of the new era would be marked by the outpouring of the Spirit. It is this doctrine that holds a key position in both St Luke's Gospel and Acts. St Luke took that doctrine into account when he planned his books. Not only does he refer to the activity of the Spirit of God in Christ's life and teaching (the Holy Ghost occurs thirteen times in the Gospel) and in the life of his Kingdom (fifty-three times in Acts), he gives a predominant place to the Spirit in his pivotal chapters. The first public appearance of Christ is given great relief in the Gospel story (Luke 4:14-30). St Luke dedicates seventeen verses to it, prefacing the event by the remark that 'Jesus came back to Galilee,' the starting-point of his mission, 'with the power of the Spirit upon him' (Luke 4:14). St Mark has two verses on the same event (Mark 4:14, 15). Likewise the public appearance of the Church has the same presence of the Spirit (Acts 2; John 20:22; Acts 4:31). This is not just a matter of planning, it is also symbolic. Symbolic in the sense that these *facts* signify a *doctrine* by reason of a *presupposed relationship*. The *facts* are the presence of the Holy Ghost marking all the great beginnings: the virginal conception (Luke 1:35), the nativity of the precursor (Luke 1:69), the prophecy of Simeon (Luke 2:27), Jesus' baptism preparatory to his mission (Luke 3:22; 4:1), his first public appearance (Luke 4:14). And just as the new era had started, so it was to continue: 'The holy spirit has made you bishops in God's church' (Acts 21:28). He decides missionary enterprises (Acts 13:14; 8:29-39; 16:6). He lives in them that follow the new way (Acts 5:32; 6:5; 8:18). And so the expansion of the Church (Acts 2:41; 5:14; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24) comes about by the encouragement of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:31). The *doctrines*, which these events teach both as facts and as symbols, can conveniently be summed up in the manner in which the theology on the Mystical Body has later phrased it, viz. that the Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church, or—from another angle—that Christ after his glorification brought to perfection the Church which he had instituted. The *presupposed relationship* between the facts of the presence of the Holy Ghost and the doctrine concerning his being the soul of the Church, is not one of efficient causality but of analogy. The many historical events describing the activity of the Spirit of God relate isolated facts; but the reality signified by these events is the doctrine that the Church in all her activities, lives and works by the presence of the Holy Ghost. In other words, St Luke uses a series of historical facts to illustrate the characteristic features of the Church. And just because the pivotal place and structure of Acts 2 is meant to bring into relief the doctrine of the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church, whose task it is to witness to Christ, and whose embrace

is universal, its narrative need not and cannot be offset by other passages dealing with the descent of the Holy Ghost (John 20:22, the Johannine Pentecost; Acts 4:31). Doing that would mean stopping short at the historical facts as facts and losing sight of their significant value. This contention invites the question: 'Does St Luke strictly adhere to the historical events and their order?' Provisionally we can only answer that the years which elapsed between the events and the writing, years of experience in the active ministry, imposed on St Luke the necessity of choosing and presenting the events, so that they would manifest these basic doctrines. Hence, to grasp their apologetic meaning we have to consider the time and circumstances to which they belong.

### III

It must first be made clear that St Luke speaks of facts, which are at the same time symbols of a deeper reality. The descent of the Holy Ghost on the disciples is said to have taken place on Pentecost day. Leaving aside what historical value may be attached to the Old Testament chronology of the Passover and the promulgation of the Law on Mt Sinai, the Scriptures present the promulgation as taking place fifty days after the Pasch (Exod. 12:18; Lev. 23:16). Although the feast of Pentecost was a harvest feast, the very consciousness of the Jews of their election, of the lawgiver Moses, of their constitution as an independent God-governed nation, would seem to suggest that the commemoration of the promulgation of the Law can never have been absent, even though as an official celebration it may be very late. Some say that there are no traces before the second century A.D. J. D. Eisenstein<sup>1</sup> maintains that Pentecost as a festival of the birthday of the Torah was the sole celebration after the exile. For one thing, it is hard to see how a harvest feast should attract so many people from such remote districts to Jerusalem, if the feast has not at the same time something of a national significance. And even if it were not officially so, one could hardly explain the introduction of a totally new feast in the second century A.D., especially in Jewish circles, if it had not been preceded by a long tradition of some sort. But in either hypothesis, the non-Jew St Luke could well see the parallel between the constitution of the theocratic Kingdom and the first manifestation of the eschatological Kingdom. And if we maintain with J. Calès<sup>2</sup> that Ps. 68, the glorious epic of Israel's grandeur, was chanted on the feast of Pentecost, then there is

<sup>1</sup> *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, IX, London 1905, c. 593; cf. I. Beaufays, *Aux Premiers Jours de l'Eglise*, Bruxelles 1944, p. 93

<sup>2</sup> *Le livre des Psaumes*, I, Paris 1936, p. 650



no doubt whatever that the constitution of the theocratic Kingdom was in the minds of those who witnessed the events (wind, fire, languages) that by their very nature were a reminder of the Sinaitic theophany. And for these reasons we think that St Luke's very representation of the facts was meant to suggest the advent and the external manifestation of a Kingdom which was to last.

If then an extraordinary event could suggest the manifestation of a new Kingdom, because it took place whilst a historic day was being commemorated, the very nature of the event itself would call up certain features by which the commencement of this new era would be made known. It would also greatly relieve St Peter's task, when trying to explain to those who lived by the Old Testament doctrines, that these phenomena did mean what they symbolised. For now the old economy would, as the marvellous results have proved, serve as the natural stepping-stone for the acceptance of the new economy. Secondly, in the Old Testament Yahweh's presence had on the one hand been indicated by fire (Exod. 3:2; 19:16; 20:18; 40:38; Num. 10:34; 11:4; Judges 13:20; Is. 6:4; Ezra 1:13) and wind (Gen. 1:2; 2:7; Exod. 15:8; 2 Sam. 5:24). It does not matter in the least that the idea 'Spirit of Yahweh' gained in precision as revelation proceeded. The very dynamism and evolution in revelation would dispose the hearers more readily to accept further developments, much as they had been announced in the Old Testament. And on the other hand, the equivocation in the statements that the Messiah would be filled with the Spirit of Yahweh (Is. 11:2), that the sinners afflict the Spirit of his Holy One (Is. 43:10) and that the Spirit of the Lord was the leader of the just (Is. 43:14) would but prepare their minds for the complete concept and activity of the Spirit. In some vague way it was known that the new era would be dominated by the fire and the Spirit. It is this idea that was taken up by St Peter in order to explain what had happened and to call attention to what was contained in the old ideas in an inchoative and imperfect way. He does so by reminding his hearers of Joel's prophecy: 'He has poured out that Spirit as you can see and hear for yourselves' (Acts 2:33). But St Luke goes a step further. It was left to him to show that this 'Day of Yahweh' is but the beginning of the end. He neatly distinguishes between 'the sound as of a rushing mighty wind (*pnoe*),' and the presence of the *pneuma*. Wind and fire do not consume what comes in their way on this Day of Yahweh, but they symbolise a divine force and inspiration.<sup>1</sup> The momentary and compact representation of the Day of Yahweh in the Old Testament is given perspective and duration. The outpouring of the Spirit is there, without the universal judgment.

<sup>1</sup> C. Lattey, 'The Mighty Wind at Pentecost,' *Scripture*, IV (1949), p. 58

The Spirit is no longer a divine attribute but an independent reality. But if this reality is to dominate the new era, it is to remain for ever. And this, in turn, is further postulated by the effects of the presence of that Spirit. But these effects would fail to deliver St Luke's message to us if we were to stop at analysing them according to their factual value.

#### IV

First of all, why does St Luke not state clearly on whom the Holy Ghost descended? Who are the 'all' of verse one? Are they the 'Twelve' or the one hundred and twenty of 1:15? Or are they all the believers in Jesus Christ? Since the whole of Acts is written in order to prove that the Church is the continuation of Christ's message and the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies on the new era, St Luke wrote from his threefold knowledge: Old Testament teaching, Christ's doctrine and an experience in the apostolic ministry. He knew that in the Old Testament the Spirit of Yahweh had been seen at work in a few elect in a transient way; that there had been some sort of a permanent presence in the anointed ones; that this presence, localised and limited in the earlier books, had been understood in a more spiritual way after the captivity; and that eventually the new era was to be marked by a universal presence of the Spirit. Secondly, the beneficial effect of this presence was not to be limited to the 'remnant' of Israel only; the New Kingdom was, according to Ezechiel (40-7) and Jeremias (33) to start from the new Jerusalem, from the Spiritual Temple. This new glory was, according to Isaia (49:6; 60), to be communicated to Jews and non-Jews alike. But his years in the ministry had taught him that this universalism was a notion but slowly acquired. Whereas Acts abounds in passages in which the universal expanse of the Church is shown, it also contains the story of the limited view of St Peter, who needed a special revelation before he accepted the pagans. And St Luke even adds that those with St Peter 'were astonished to find that the free gift of the Holy Spirit could be lavished upon the gentiles' (10:45). In fact, a long apology seems to be necessary to show that this universalism was indeed God's plan (ch. 11)! St Luke realised all this when he was planning Acts. He knew that on Pentecost day St Peter had addressed the 'men of Israel' (Acts 2:22), 'all the house of Israel' (2:36). He knew that at the council of Jerusalem, where the authorities had gathered, there had been grave dissension about the equality of the non-Jews. And that is why St Luke does not want to specify his 'all.' The impression must be 'all,' without limits, though, of course, it could actually be but a certain number. That is why



it is said that all were gathered together, that all were filled with the Holy Spirit. And to give further emphasis to this premeditated universalism, which it was evidently difficult to grasp, he appends that table of nations. Unless we keep in mind that this enumeration is meant to symbolise and teach the Church's universality, we are bound to end in a deadlock, when trying to solve the difficulties. The point is that all these eighteen groups, whether they were residents or pilgrims—either view finding support in the text—the point is that they all seem to be genuinely astonished at hearing the praise of God's wonders in their own languages. Evidently St Luke is not at all worried about inserting the Judaeans, who seem to be out of place, if the accent is on the foreign or strange languages. Nor is he concerned with the languages as such, or with the problem whether the miracle is in the speaking or in the hearing. Did the hearers gather around St Peter and the eleven (v. 14) or around the 'all' of v. 4? Did whoever spoke, speak several languages at the same time, so that more than fifteen languages were heard? Or did they speak the four languages—Zend, Semitic, Greek and Latin—that would cover the native tongue of each? These are the questions which we ask, and not the problems which St Luke meant to solve.

His problem was of a totally different nature: to show the vivifying workings of the Holy Ghost, the task of the Church as a witness and her universalism. And then we see that St Luke mentions the nations according to their territorial division, starting from the North-East and going to the West and South, with a more detailed enumeration of the Hellenistic world, better known to him than the purely Roman provinces. They hailed from 'every country under heaven' (Acts 2:5). And that addition is not meant as a hyperbole, as e.g. in Acts 19:10 where it is said that during St Paul's two years at Ephesus 'the Lord's word came to all those who lived in Asia, both Jews and Greeks.' But here the meaning is that God's new message right from the very start went out to and was understood by this representation of all the nations of the world. That that is his message is further corroborated by the description of the charism of glossolaly. St Luke wrote his Acts possibly less than ten years after St Paul sent his first letter to the Corinthians. It cannot prudently be doubted that St Paul's travelling companion was fully informed about this charism of glossolaly which St Paul discusses in 1 Cor. 14. St Paul teaches quite clearly that 'talking with a strange tongue is a sign given to unbelievers.' True enough, those who heard the miracle of speech (in Acts 2) were all God-fearing Jews or proselytes. But the accent is on the fact that they represent the whole world. Moreover, much stress is laid on the hearing of the languages, as several exegetes remark.

Evidently the miracle is worked for them, i.e. for the whole world. And so St Luke covertly announces a doctrine, to which he will return time and again in the rest of his work. If we ask why St Luke should have preferred this veiled way to a clear statement, then the answer would seem to be, firstly because in so doing he followed a method particularly dear to the Eastern mind, secondly because it would bring to mind so many allusions to relevant passages in the Old Testament, and thirdly in deference to St Peter. A plain statement would have formed a painful contrast to St Peter's address, his subsequent interests and his reversion to previous views, even though he had been corrected by a special revelation. As is also clear from his Gospel, St Luke avoids hurting people. His writings suggest the perfect gentleman, whose sole aim is the truth, but who will never hammer it into shape on the backs of others, if he can avoid it.

The whole world then, hears. But this hearing had a special meaning for the Old Testament Jew. The Hellenistic mystics and the gnostics stressed the visual aspect in revelation, whereas in the Old Testament religion, revelation came mainly by listening. If, therefore, it is correct to say, as some do, that in our passage the hearing is prevalent, it may well be that St Luke purposely stressed that aspect of the miracle, in order to create the subconscious conviction that this message must be listened to, because it is Yahweh who speaks. This would explain the difficulty that 'other tongues' were used, though only believing Jews were present, who as a matter of fact would have understood Greek or Aramaic. But it does not solve the question of whether the 'other tongues' are foreign languages or strange expressions; in other words, whether the miracle is one of languages or the charism of glossolaly.<sup>1</sup> We have explained it as a miracle of languages, without having recourse to the theory that these were the languages necessary for the Apostolic teaching. On the other hand, the aim of the 'tongues' does not seem to be preaching, but the telling of God's wonders. Moreover, the miracle starts before any people had gathered. So, not languages but glossolaly? It would seem that St Luke purposely avoids saying what precisely took place. Writing so many years after the event, and knowing from the practice of the ministry, as is very clear from the rest of Acts, that the omnipresence of the Holy Ghost in a universal Church must be made clear, he arranged the facts to stress that doctrine. All were united: one united fire parts into many 'tongues,' and many 'tongues' tell all 'tongues' about God's wonders. This they could do only because of the dynamism of the fire. At the same time an interpretation is necessary (as in glossolaly), and it is provided by St Peter. But his explanation

<sup>1</sup> B. Haensler, 'Zu Apf 2, 4,' *Biblische Zeitschrift*, xii (1914), pp. 35-44

is not an interpretation of what the disciples had uttered, as is the case in glossolaly, but of the fact as such. St Peter's explanation has the same effects as were known to be consequent on glossolaly. That is why St Luke could present the miracle as glossolaly, but in such terms that the historical fact is not misrepresented. And this was best expressed by 'other tongues' as the 'other' can allude to both glossolaly (strange expressions) and multiple languages.<sup>1</sup> But then, the speaking in languages before the crowd had gathered need no longer constitute a difficulty. For, apart from the fact that St Luke sometimes finishes one section of his story and then reverts to a detail of it, as in Zachary's *Benedictus*, the event may well have been inserted there to suggest glossolaly, whereas it need not necessarily have preceded the coming together of the pilgrims.

## V

The narrative of the descent of the Holy Ghost is therefore far more than a historical account. St Luke has, of set purpose, availed himself of all the possible links with the Old Testament, which the historical facts have or could be made to suggest. Thus the great events of the day, explained by St Peter, would serve a double function: they would cast light on many a dark problem of the Old Testament, and at the same time show that this same Old Testament, in which they so firmly believed, was being fulfilled now. Therefore this new development must be believed with the same faith with which they had accepted the teachings of the Old Testament. But it took years of experience in the ministry to bring St Luke to write his apologetic tract and to write it 'in order' (Luke 1:3).

And thus the whole planning of the story, the terminology used and the many implicit references to the messianic character of the Old Testament are in themselves signs that would be understood by the people of the time, and a bridge linking the old economy with the new. The obscure words and imagery in which the old was veiled would invite those of goodwill to avail themselves of the light, the one light that was offered, and whose rays were sparks, shot off from the one great fire, symbolised by the tongues on that day.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Weterman, 'Het Pinksterfeest naar Hand 2,' *Nederlandse Katholieke Stemmen*, LII (1956), p. 106

## THE MEANING OF 'SIN'

No-one would deny that the word 'sin' is used in the Bible to cover many different aspects of the idea of wickedness or opposition to the will of God. This is obvious to anyone who examines the different Hebrew words, all translated in the Septuagint by the same word *hamartia*, and in the English versions by the one word 'sin.' It is true that we also find such variants as injustice, lawlessness, evil, guilt, but there is no consistency in the way such words are used.<sup>1</sup> There is a place within the concept of sin as found in the Bible, for many different aspects, aspects which we no longer take cognisance of in our narrower definition of sin as any deliberate act, by thought, word, or deed of a responsible individual, against the law of God. If we limit sin to an act, if we limit it to the act of the individual, and if especially we insist upon the moral responsibility of the individual, then it is vital to realise that the Biblical term 'sin' has a much wider connotation than when we use the term. The fundamental meaning of *hata*, the commonest word for 'to sin,' is to miss the mark, to lose or to fail, and through all the terms used for sin there is the underlying idea of a falling short of a norm given to man by God. There is no doubt, therefore, about sin having its origin in the deliberate and conscious failure to conform to God's law; in other words, sin is fundamentally a responsible act of rebellion. The moral aspect of sin can never be lost sight of; the wider use of the term does not deny this fundamental morality. But it is precisely on the wider use of the term that we must insist, because it is here that we are most likely to fail in appreciating the teaching of Holy Scripture on sin. Thus the consequences of man's failure to observe the Divine law loom large within the general notion of sin,<sup>2</sup> and those consequences are indicated by this same word. In fact, the failure to follow the norm laid down by God is often only recognised when the consequences are felt, as is shown in many of the lament psalms where the psalmist's sufferings lead him to a full realisation of his sinfulness, and of the necessity of confessing it to God: 'As long as I kept silent my bones rotted, and I moaned unceasingly; for day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my strength ebbed as in the summer heat. I have confessed my sin to Thee, and I have not concealed my wretchedness;

<sup>1</sup> The Greek word *hamartia* is employed to translate fifteen different Hebrew words (and this does not include different variations of the same verbal stem); *adikia* stands for thirty-six different Hebrew words; *anomia* for twenty-four. cf. Quell, *Theol. Wört.*, 1, pp. 267ff.

<sup>2</sup> cf. *Theol. Wört.*, 1, p. 280, ll. 29ff.

I said: I will confess my rebellion to the Lord; and Thou hast removed my wretchedness, my sin thou hast pardoned' (Ps. 32:3-5). We would perhaps use the word 'guilt' as a term of general reference to the consequences of sin, and the various Hebrew words which are translated by 'sin' have this meaning in those contexts where the author is not concerned with a sinful deed, but with the resulting condition and the inner state produced by this deed. The causal connection between the two is not clearly shown, since it was a most difficult question in view of the overriding sovereignty of God over all things, good and evil.<sup>1</sup>

Guilt is spoken of as a positive reality, in terms of a burden or of a disease. Thus guilt can be a burden too heavy for man to carry (Ps. 38:5). It is in substance identical with sufferings which may afflict a man, and guilt reveals itself through these sufferings. Cain's banishment to the wilderness, to a land which he will not be able to cultivate, is a suffering which constitutes his 'guilt' which, he complains, is too heavy for him to bear (Gen. 4:13). Grief and regret and sorrow for sin are called forth by grief over pain and misery and misfortunes; in practice the grief is identical. It is particularly important for those who wish to understand the significance of penitential practices, to realise the close connection in the Biblical theology, between guilt and bodily sickness. Thus the law (Lev. 13-14) laid down strict regulations for various skin diseases,<sup>2</sup> because they were external signs of guilt, and the result of sins (the latter word not necessarily indicating any responsible action against God's law on the part of the individual sufferer). These laws are not to be adequately explained in terms of hygienic precautions, made more effective by a religious setting; it is perfectly reasonable to suppose that such hygienic reasons as the prevention of contagion were not ignored, but their primary purpose was to emphasise the guilt involved. Thus not only must the sufferer keep away from others, but his clothes must be torn and his hair unbound (Lev. 13:45). The priest must destroy contaminated clothes and houses, as well as diagnose the ailment. But he was not simply doctor and sanitary inspector: he must offer cultic sacrifices. For the 'leprous house' there must be a sacrifice—for the *sin* of the house. For the sick man's cleansing there must be a 'sacrifice for sin' which constitutes the rite of expiation for his impurity; the Septuagint does

<sup>1</sup> Only one Hebrew word, *'asam*, is used to express clearly this state of guilt, and this word is found almost exclusively in ritual contexts. A man could be considered guilty, without any deliberate refusal to observe God's law; he could become guilty or impure through ignorance.

<sup>2</sup> cf. L. Koehler in *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 1955 (Heft 3/4), p. 290

not hesitate to speak of the sin-offering which the priest offers as a propitiation 'concerning the one who is being cleansed *from his sin*' (Lev. 14:19). In similar fashion later Judaism taught that sickness was a punishment for sin, and that the sick man did not get rid of his sickness until all his sins were forgiven. Death, the evil most feared by men, was the most striking consequence of sin: 'It is by woman (namely sinful Eve) that sin began, and it is because of her that we all die' (Sir. 25:24). 'It is by the envy of the devil that death entered the world. Those who belong to him will experience it' (Wisd. 2:24). A similar saying among the Rabbis was 'No death without sin, and no chastisement without guilt.'

That Our Lord's disciples held the same belief is clear from their question on seeing a man blind from his birth: 'Who sinned, this man or his parents, so that he should be born blind?' But Our Lord's reply seems to deny the truth of their belief: 'Neither this man sinned nor his parents, but that the works of God might be shown forth in him' (John 9:3). If the first part of this reply were taken from its context, and made to stand as an independent statement, then of course it would be a clear denial of any connection, in this case at least, between blindness and sin. But it must not be torn from its context. In examining its context, we see that something must be supplied in order to make Our Lord's answer a complete sentence; there are two possibilities: 'Neither this man sinned nor his parents, *so that he should be born blind*, but in order that the works of God might be shown forth in him,' or: 'Neither this man sinned nor his parents, *but he was born blind* in order that the works of God might be shown forth in him.' The first suggestion is preferable, since it only involves repeating the words which end the disciples' question, and which therefore could reasonably be omitted as understood. In this case the sense is that in God's designs, the final purpose of sin, of which the consequence<sup>1</sup> had been this blindness, would be the showing forth of God's works, the manifestation of His glory. Our Lord is not categorically denying the connection between blindness and sin, but is insisting rather on the Divine purpose to be found in all human action,<sup>2</sup> a purpose which is about to be made manifest here in the restoration of sight. Our Lord is almost rebuking the disciples for asking a question which is of lesser moment here. Had they not read in Ben Sirach: 'You must not say: What is this? Why that? For all has been created for a purpose' (39:21)? If we were to adopt the second paraphrase, the meaning would not differ: the final purpose of the man's blindness is the manifestation of God's

<sup>1</sup> 'A final *hina* corresponds here to the consecutive *hina* of the question.' Stauffer, in *Theol. Wört.*, III, p. 328, l. 4

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 327-30



glory. Here, the statement: 'Neither this man sinned nor his parents' seems more categorical; but it is so only in appearance, for in what sense can we say that he was born blind in order that the works of God might be shown forth in him, except as an expression of the final purpose of God, whereby evil is changed into good? Our Lord is here concerned with the final end of all things: 'It is for judgment that I came into this world, in order that<sup>1</sup> (as God's final purpose, which we can only know from the results) those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind' (John 9:39; cf. Mark 4:11f.). There is a close parallel to this text, which confirms our interpretation: when told of Lazarus's sickness, Our Lord says: 'This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, in order that the Son of God may be glorified through it' (John 11:4). Without any essential change, this can be made exactly parallel to Our Lord's reply concerning the blind man: thus 'He is not sick, so that he should die, but in order that the Son of God may be glorified in him.' It is impossible to take the first clause as an absolute statement, for we are told both that Lazarus was sick and that he died (John 11:4, 39). To understand the clause 'Neither this man sinned nor his parents that he should be born blind' as an absolute statement, is perhaps less obviously, but nevertheless equally, impossible.

So it would be a mistake to think that this wider use of the term 'sin' is confined to the Old Testament. It is clear that the one word is used in the New Testament, for three ideas which, whilst having a common factor ultimately based, as in the Old Testament, upon the moral act against God's law, make the word more extensive than the modern definition of sin. The word is used to describe an action contrary to the norm laid down by God; it is used of the condition in which man finds himself as a result of such sinful actions—a condition which though not necessarily, yet generally, reveals itself in various miseries he has to suffer; and it is used to signify the personified power of evil which is in the world. Somewhat to our surprise, it is in the first sense that it is used least frequently.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand the word is often used in the sense of sinful state, i.e. the condition of a man who is separated from and at enmity with God. Thus the Christian is dead to his sins (1 Pet. 2:24) in so far as he has ceased to be in a sinful state; and yet there are those who do not abandon (the state of) sin (2 Pet. 2:14—note the singular: *hamartias*,

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 328, l. 11

<sup>2</sup> Out of 50 examples quoted in *Theol. Wört.*, I, p. 297, ll. 20ff. as examples of the word 'sin' in the sense of wicked actions only 11 are clearly so: Matt. 12:32; Acts 7:60; James 2:9; 4:17; 5:15; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:3, 9; 5:16; 2 Cor. 11:7; cf. John 8:34.

and not the plural, which would have been required if the sense had been: Do not cease from doing sinful deeds). Before Baptism we walked about in sins (Eph. 2:2), and those who do not believe will die in their sins (John 8:21, 24). To the Jews Our Lord said, 'Your sin remains' (John 9:41). Evidently they remain in the state of sin which arises from refusing to see the light. And this condition often brings with it the outward manifestations of sin, so that Paul can speak of 'the body of sin' (Rom. 6:6) or 'the flesh of sin' (Rom. 8:3) where he means the bodily weaknesses which men suffer as a result of sin. It is because of this wider meaning of the word that he can say that God 'made him who knew not sin, him He made sin, for our sakes' (2 Cor. 5:21): Our Lord had never known what it was to sin; yet God afflicted him with sufferings and even with death, evils which may be classified under the general term 'sin.'

But the close connection between sinful deeds and the miseries which are their consequences is most clearly seen in Our Lord's miracles.<sup>1</sup> The amount of attention given in the gospels to his works of healing is significant. The purpose behind it is not directly to show his great compassion for the sick, nor, for that matter, to represent him as a healer possessed of miraculous powers, though both are clearly true. But the precise reason is that by these miracles he shows his power over sin. The miracles of healing are a clear proof to the readers of the gospels that Jesus is the Messiah, whose victory over evil is assured; and for that reason they are the sign that God's kingdom is truly come. The answer sent to John the Baptist is that the blind see, the lame walk, the leprous are healed, the deaf hear, the dead rise, the good news is told to the poor; Jesus, as Luke adds, was at that time healing many people suffering from diseases, infirmities, evil spirits and blindness (7:21ff.). Preaching the good news and healing diseases went together (Matt. 4:23; 9:35). That the healing of diseases was external proof of Our Lord's power over evil is clear from the way in which it is linked with the expulsion of evil spirits. The evil spirits themselves bore witness to the messianic power of Jesus, for they cried out: 'Thou art the son of God,' and he forbade them to speak because they knew he was the Christ (Luke 4:40; 8:2; Mark 1:34; 3:10). There is no sharp distinction to be drawn between those that were sick and those that were possessed by evil spirits, since the sickness was but the result of the power of evil. Thus we are told of the healing of a man possessed, who was blind and dumb (Matt. 12:22), and of the lunatic child who was healed at the moment when the demon went out of him (Matt. 17:18). Our Lord did not resort to elaborate methods of exorcism; by a

<sup>1</sup> Beyer, *Theol. Wört.*, III, pp. 129-31

simple command the evil spirits were expelled. Thus does he show his power, and in face of such evidence it is constantly necessary to command that his messiahship, so clearly shown, should not yet be proclaimed; yet the messiah was to be recognised, not so much by his wonderful healing powers as by his conquest of all evil. Moreover, it was because these miracles were not essentially manifestations of power over nature, but of victory over evil, that Our Lord gave the same power to his disciples. Sending them to preach the imminent coming of the kingdom, he commands them to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons (Matt. 10:8). He gives them authority over impure spirits, with power to expel them, and to heal any disease (Matt. 10:1). This power was in no way magical: it could only be used successfully where there was faith; the disciples failed because of their lack of it (Matt. 17:16), and Our Lord himself could not do many miracles in Nazareth because he found so little faith there (Mark 6:5); throughout the Bible it is revealed that God never conquers the evils which afflict men, without men's co-operation, which demands from them the belief in His power and His willingness to rescue them. Had He not led the children of Israel from Egypt, and yet failed to rescue those who lacked faith in the desert? The now outmoded attack on the person of Christ used to make great play of this need for faith in the recipients of his healing; it gave the opening for parallels to be drawn with cases of faith-healing, and such words as auto-suggestion, hallucination, hysteria, could then be bandied about. And some Christian apologetes could not be wholly exonerated, for they so stressed the miraculous nature of these works that they obscured the true significance of this need for faith, and were inclined to find it embarrassing. God never, throughout His revelation of Himself, worked wonders for their own sake; they were all directed towards His redemptive purpose of saving His people from evil. And He has never rescued anyone who freely chose not to be rescued, a choice which in practice is expressed by incredulity in face of the signs which show God as the rescuer of all who trust in Him.

It is because sin has in Biblical language the wider significance we have been considering, that the New Testament also speaks of sins as positive realities even when, as is clear from the context, the sinful acts are a thing of the past; in this respect sins are what we would call the lasting effects of sins. St Paul speaks of the 'sufferings of sins' (*pathēmata hamartiōn*), which used to work in our limbs to bear fruit in death (Rom. 7:5); this expression seems to become less odd when it is translated 'sinful passions,' but how can we talk of 'passions' as positive active things, unless we accept the point of view which

regards the injuries inflicted by sin as positive realities which remain after the sinful deeds are done? The verbs used of the action of Christ on sin: to take away, to carry, to loose, to purge, would all suggest the same thing. And it is a consequence of looking on sin as a positive and lasting reality that it is also spoken of as a personified power, which came into the world (Rom. 5:12) and came alive (7:9), seducing and killing (7:11) and laying siege (Heb. 12:1). It lives in us, bringing sufferings and desire (Rom. 7:17; 20:5, 8). In fact it is a demoniacal power, under whose tyranny man is a slave (Rom. 3:9; cf. 11:32). Sin lords it over us (Rom. 6:14) as a king (Rom. 5:21; 6:12), with no other reward for services rendered than death (Rom. 6:23). This concept of sin as a personified power is almost exclusively found in the Epistle to the Romans, but we have echoes of the same idea in John 8:34, where everyone who does sin becomes the slave of sin, and in James 1:5 where sin is born of concupiscence, and fully formed gives birth to death.

It might well be objected that all these expressions which we have examined are simply metaphorical expressions, and that they are not to be taken literally. Sin, the objection might run, is spoken of as a positive reality *metaphorically*, it causes us physical harm *metaphorically*, it brings death *metaphorically*. When the word is used in the Bible in the sense which tallies with our definition of sin, then it is to be taken literally; in the other cases, where it goes beyond our definition, it is used *metaphorically*. But this is too facile altogether. When is human language *not* metaphorical as used of the truths of Faith? To define sin as an offence against God: is this any less metaphorical? To say that sin is not being but the privation of being: is this any more direct and positive than these so-called metaphors of sin which we find in the Bible? If the expressions we have considered were few and far between, and were used for ideas which were elsewhere expressed in 'literal' terms, then we would agree with the objection. When, for instance, Our Lord says, 'I am the vine,' we know clearly enough already, who 'I' is, not to take 'vine,' literally; when we are told that the lilies of the field do not spin, we have no reason to think that lilies were thought to be capable of spinning. But sin is not spoken of in any other way than those we have examined; when we say that sin, according to its context, is regarded chiefly from the standpoint of an *act* in contravention of the divine law, or, in another case, chiefly as a positive consequence of such an act producing a real state or condition, or, finally, that it is a powerful force which causes certain effects, we are speaking inadequately, in human terms, about something we do not fully understand; but we are not speaking merely metaphorically,

in the accepted sense of this word ; if we were, then we ought to be able to go on and give the literal explanation also. These uses of the word 'sin' show us what the Biblical writers believed concerning sin ; they were no more capable of expressing their belief adequately than we are, but it is rather gratuitous to dismiss their concepts as primitive and inadequate. Their ideas, in the terms with which they conveyed them, are the ideas and terms which God saw fit to use in revealing the notion of sin to us. They are necessarily limited, as is the whole of God's action in human affairs ; but it is important to remember that the idea of sin which we are seeking is a *revealed* idea of a truth beyond the limits of our understanding. We are quite capable of elaborating a notion of natural sin ; we can develop a *philosophy* of sin ; we can, moreover, offer a rational, philosophical explanation of the theological teaching on sin, in order to assist some people to grasp the truth of Faith in a way suited to their particular mode of thinking. But it is nevertheless important to keep before our mind the revelation of sin which we are attempting to explain : it would be unfortunate if the truth were dominated by the explanation ; no one philosophical explanation has exclusive rights over any truth of Faith. The definition of sin in terms of offence against God is useful for all, since all are accustomed to human relationships in which a man so frequently offends his neighbour ; to explain sin as the infringement of God's law, and consequently as deserving of punishment, is almost as generally useful, since practically all men are accustomed to having their lives governed by laws, enforced by the enacting of penalties against law breakers. When, however, we speak of sin as a privation of being, we are giving an explanation which is useful to a select few : to those who have been trained to think along certain philosophical lines it is a good explanation : amongst other things, it 'exonerates' God from any positive causality with regard to sin. Even for the philosophically minded it does not, of course, satisfy all difficulties ; for many it explains nothing : to speak of toothache or cancer as 'privations of being' is easier for the healthy man than for the sick ; a hole in the road is positive enough for the man who falls into it.

The examination of the term sin, therefore, is not merely a contribution to a Biblical glossary, which we have to bear in mind if we are to understand the Biblical texts. It gives us the revealed teaching on sin, whether we in turn present this teaching in different terminology or not. In actual fact translation into other terms is now necessary, for we fail to realise other Biblical concepts which are essential to the proper use of the Biblical terminology of sin. If, for instance, we spoke of the sickness of an innocent child, or the sufferings of a

saintly man, as sin, our hearers would be horrified, for there is no responsibility for sin in the case of these individuals. Yet according to the Bible there is such a thing as a corporate responsibility, whereby a certain group, whether a family, or a clan, or the whole of the chosen people, or even the whole of the human race, shares responsibility in certain circumstances, for good or ill. The examples of corporate punishment for sin are among the most difficult texts in the Bible for the modern reader. But they are most pertinent to our subject, and they cannot be dismissed as primitive and outmoded. It is true that there has been some development in the course of revelation, whereby the individual's rights and responsibilities were increasingly clarified; but, as J. de Fraine says, 'It is incontestable that the mention of the individual as object of the divine attention, or as subject of the religious relationship, is surpassed by far by the mention of the nation as religious object or subject.'<sup>1</sup> With some reason Ezechiel has been called the father of individualism (cf. Ezech. 18), but it is a mistake to think that in saying that the children's teeth will no longer be set on edge by the sour grapes their fathers ate, he removed the principle of corporate responsibility from God's scheme completely. De Fraine points out that even in Jeremias and Ezechiel this is by no means ignored. And anyone who tries to realise the fundamental importance of St Paul's teaching on the body of Christ will refrain from dismissing the idea of a corporate responsibility as just an Old Testament idea. It is so important to emphasise this truth, though we cannot examine it here; our tendency towards an exaggerated individualism causes great difficulties in theology, and perhaps especially in the theology of sin and penance. Our division of man into body and soul is another reason for the difficulty we find in accepting the Biblical doctrine of sin in all its fulness. We insist so much on sin being an affair of the soul: mortal sin, for instance, causing the 'death of the soul,' that bodily sickness and physical death become no more than images of sin and its effects. But this dichotomy is foreign to Biblical theology, as P. Benoit has recently shown.<sup>2</sup> Yet another difficulty makes this total view of sin seem completely unreal: the forgiveness of sin fails to remove such evils. But this difficulty is only one aspect among many, of the great Christian paradox: we are redeemed and yet we must still work out our salvation in fear and trembling; Christ has conquered the devil, and yet the latter goes about seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8). 'We are dead to sin' (Rom. 6:2). But are we? Such mysterious truths as these are fully explained neither by the Biblical nor the philosophical

<sup>1</sup> 'Individu et Société dans la Religion de l'Ancien Testament,' *Biblica*, xxxiii (1952), p. 445

<sup>2</sup> 'The Holy Eucharist—II,' *Scripture*, ix (1957), pp. 6-8



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explanation of sin, and in face of the difficulties, we may prefer to retain our modern use of the term ‘sin.’ But we have no choice with regard to the substance of the Biblical teaching which lies behind the Bible’s use of this word, and in point of fact we actually retain the term in its Biblical sense in the expression ‘original sin.’ It is here where our definition of sin proves so inadequate that we have difficulty in showing how ‘original sin’ is sin. We would not refer to the sickness of the child as sin, but we must regard it as a manifestation or an effect of original sin. Every evil in Biblical thought comes within that all-embracing term sin, not excluding the evils to be found in material creation, since it too awaits its redemption (Rom. 8:19ff.). The taking away of sin, therefore (or, as we would say, the forgiveness, or remission of sin) means, finally at least, the taking away of all evil. A sharp division between spiritual good and material good is as alien to the thought of the Bible as is a sharp division between spiritual evil and physical evil. To make such a division is to obscure the full import of the messianic hope,<sup>1</sup> and Our Lord’s fulfilment of it.

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T. WORDEN

‘ IN THE WORLD AND NOT OF  
THE WORLD ’<sup>2</sup>

(Translated from the French by B. Dickinson)

We find little in St Paul about the sanctification of a Christian who has interests in the world. St Paul more readily thinks of him, it would seem, as disinterested in the world. Is this because of a kind of indifference—without hostility, however—towards the world ‘whose form is passing away’ (1 Cor. 7:31), an indifference to its culture, to its present fate? It seems that St Paul, just like Our Lord in the Gospel, without feeling hostile towards this life, was really interested only in the next. . . .

Yet we find in St Paul a few pronouncements which apply to our problem. These are the texts :

I mean, brethren, the appointed time has grown very short : from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world

<sup>1</sup> The language in which the prophets expressed the blessings to come has too readily been taken as mere metaphor, and the messianic hope of Israel rather too glibly labelled as materialistic. There are signs that this kind of judgment is now being modified to some extent, cf. J. van der Ploeg, *Revue Biblique* (1954), pp. 497ff. Pinckaers : ‘L’Espérance de l’A.T. est-elle la même que la nôtre?’ *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, lxxvii, pp. 785–99.

<sup>2</sup> cf. John 17:9–19

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as though they had no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away. (1 Cor. 7:29-31)

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. (2 Cor. 4:7-11)

... as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labours, watching, hunger; by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything. (2 Cor. 6:4-10)

For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor. 12:10)

It is noteworthy that these texts are ‘dialectic,’ that is to say they utter in the same breath a *yes* and *no* about the same thing. This contradiction we ourselves summed up in the formula, ‘In the world and not of the world.’

*In the world and not of the world.* Theoretically, such expressions exactly meet the case of a Christian layman who wants to take his Christianity seriously—his vocation to eternal life and his call to be a saint—together with his assignment to the work of this world, which seems to determine clearly, in a definite way, his state as a layman. As a Christian, he must be native to heaven, where dwells the Lord to whom he has dedicated his life and handed over, so to speak, all the keys of his house. That removes him from worldly ways of living: St Paul tells us that, in Christ, there is no longer either man or woman, either slave or free, either Greek or barbarian, meaning that this world's ways of living have been completely left behind (cf. Gal. 3:27-8; Col. 3:4). We belong to a new unity and a new reality, the Body of Christ, that is nourished from a source which is new and entirely from on high, the Spirit of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). It is no longer the life of a man or a woman, employer or employee, Englishman or German that I have to live, but the life of Christ, a life ‘hidden with Christ in God’ (Col. 3:3). Being still in the flesh, I live, but it is no longer I, it is Christ who lives in me his risen life (Gal. 2:20).

All the same, I live; I am still in the flesh, man or woman, employer

or employee, Englishman or German and, as such, I have to work out my salvation, to sanctify myself, to glorify God. It is not a man in the abstract, it is a man in a certain 'situation' who must sing the glory of God. The lay state allows precisely the exercise of those activities by which the passing world endures and is built up, and a grasp of all those threads of which the specific stuff of this world is woven: family, profession, the State. The priest or religious may well merely lend themselves to all that, looking upon it simply as a spiritual training or as an occasion for charity. This the layman cannot do; he is obliged to give himself up to it. He can no more be indifferent to the world than he is undifferentiated in the world.

The contradictions expressed by St Paul in the texts we have quoted seem to us to formulate fairly closely the crucial paradoxes of the holiness required from the Christian who is committed to the world. He is bound to keep faith at one and the same time with the two systems of thought and the two loyalties that we have styled: in the world and not of the world. But these Pauline formulae might well be, with all the 'high-toned smartness' commonly assumed by paradoxes, either literary figures of speech (!) or deliberately enigmatic utterances. Now our St Paul certainly had in mind something at once very simple, very profound and very practical (which does not mean: easy). He was offering a word of life, for our life at its most concrete. Let us try, humbly, to understand the meaning of these texts. What is the *reality* that lies hidden beneath these formulae—a reality at once simple, workaday and sublime, like that of the Gospel?

*Dying to the world.* By faith and by the life of faith, built up as it is through living contact with Our Lord in the communion of the Church, the Christian is truly withdrawn from the world, dead to the world. He is crucified with Christ to the life of the flesh, that is to say to the life of nature, or, as Ignatius of Antioch expressed it, to all that is *Eros*, to all that is here below (Rom. 8:2). We are born by another birth, not of the flesh or of the will of man, but of the Spirit. It is this which gives the innermost meaning, if we examine them closely, to virginity, fasting and that kind of logic, so well set forth by Dom Morin, Dom J. Leclercq and Père L. Bouyer, according to which the religious life (monastic life) is simply Christian life taken completely in earnest. You have only to remember St Francis of Assisi. . . .

There is thus, in all genuine Christian life, a kind of radical devaluation and escape from the love of things of this world, wife or husband, money, health, bodily strength and beauty, power or reputation, reasoning and making provision, friends, and even culture. There is no Christianity, no sanctity, without dying to all that. That

is why, when we read any life of a Saint, we always come upon men who forsake their family, treat their body as an enemy, despise money and all human glory—in a word, consider this world as refuse (Phil. 3:8). Doubtless we must make allowance for some rhetorical distortion, often found in 'Lives of Saints,' but while granting also perhaps other modifications, all that is to be found literally in the Gospel and in St Paul.

*The world, duty and vocation.* However, in a second order of time, which corresponds with the other term of the antithesis, all that is given back to us: wife and children, and eventually strength and beauty, wealth and power, our body itself with its joy and loveliness, yes, all that is given back. And along with all that, is restored the world and all that goes with the thrilling adventure of man in the world of men: action, exploration, discoveries, technical mastery, politics, progress. . . . But, just as, in the first order of time, we are dead to all that, we no longer know it according to the flesh; so all that is given back to us, not from below and carnally, not, that is to say, for our enjoyment in the world's eyes or our own—as in fact it is given us in our first birth, according to the flesh—but from on high, as a duty and a grace. For every duty, every mission, implies a task to which the corresponding means (graces) are allotted.

All that is given back to us as a vocation from God, a mission to carry out in His name and in His sight, according to His wishes. This means working for the intentions of love, salvation, communion and eternal life which God seeks in His creation.

Yes, I receive a wife again—but 'in the Lord': 1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 11:11; Eph. 5:21; Col. 3:18; strength and wealth again—but to use in the service of the Lord, who wills that all our 'having' should be useful for *everyone*, as being part of his paternal inheritance, should give joy to all his family, that is to say, to all men. I shall have children—but, again, 'in the Lord': Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20; perhaps servants or subordinates, always 'in the Lord': Eph. 6:5 seq.; Phil. 16:20. There will once more be beauty for my eyes and sweetness for my heart—but received from God as a gift, and therefore accepted with thanksgiving and directed to serve Him in everything that constitutes His will for the world and for me. . . .

In this way the necessary detachment that we live in from the first moment is not indifference: for the world is given back to us, by the will of God, as a duty and a vocation.

*A double and difficult loyalty.* Such is the way in which, at one and the same time, one both has and has not. Such is the way of having a wife as though one had none, or, equally well, of having children, health, intelligence, money, friends, power, etc. . . . St

Augustine collates the first text we quoted above (1 Cor. 7:29-31 : '*... let those who have wives live as though they had none, etc. . . .*') with this text from the eschatological discourse : 'Woe to the women who are with child or who give suck in that day' (Mark 13:17), and he interprets it in this way : Woe to the Christian who is found by his Lord attached to earthly occupations.

The secret of 'using as though you used it not' is to use with detachment. And the secret of using with detachment is to refer everything back to God. Was it not in this way that our Lord 'had' all things, having them *as the Son*, that is, as received from his Father and as due to be returned to his Father? Here we might examine those passages in the Gospel, particularly in St John, in which the filial soul of Jesus finds voice : 'My teaching is not *my* teaching, but that of the Father, who sent me' (John 7:16). . . . Was it not in this way that Abraham, our father, 'had' his son Isaac? In the first instance, it was in the unlikely circumstances of his conception, and, a second time, after consenting to sacrifice him and having received him back again, by God's mercy (Gen. 22). Since he had consented to sacrifice him, and his son had been given back to him from on high, he no longer possessed him in carnal fashion, but entirely from God and for God, according to the promise and according to grace. And yet he possessed him in a real and truly human sense. In a word, he now possessed him in a way that was entirely different, a way that obliged him to 'give thanks' to God.

These things are difficult perhaps. They are so profound ! It is well worth the trouble of reflecting on them very carefully : not just once and for all, by the mental gymnastics of a moment, but throughout the course of life, by feeding our meditation from our own life, just as we should feed our life from our meditation. This is the necessary requisite for all thought, if it is to be profound and fruitful. It demands also mutual discussion, in the intimacy between husband and wife, between friends, among Christian communities. In this way we can benefit from that mutual enrichment which is one of the greatest blessings of a fraternal union founded upon a common quest for God.

*The main lines of lay spirituality.* Here, then, very briefly expressed, are a few points that plot, in the light of these truths, the main lines of a 'spirituality' or way of holiness for the Christian who is engaged in the world's work.

I First of all, this holiness or spirituality will always be composed of two moments : disconnecting, connecting. These two moments will, in some cases, succeed each other with a fairly clean 'break and make,' and in that order, through the whole course of a lifetime, as

we can see it happening in the lives of many saints. But more often these two moments will shuttle continually to and fro in our span of life, together weaving, like the warp and the web, the real stuff of our ascent towards God, across the bitternesses and the joys of His service.

2 Next: any plan for sanctifying ourselves in the world presupposes that we should try to understand God's purposes: in general, for the world, and in particular for ourselves. One of the tasks and, in fact, one of the benefits or one of the achievements of Catholic Action is precisely this. It reveals God's plan and *our place in the world* to us, and then, in the course of time and through actual problems it gives us a faculty for seeing it: in such a way that we know exactly *what it is* that has been given back to us as our task and vocation, after we have withdrawn by a 'death to this world,' and as our responsibility before our Father. Along this same line, a spirituality for a Christian in the world will most of all draw life from a very humble and very loving consecration to the will of God, as we tried to show in Chapter IX of *Jalons Pour Une Théologie du Laïcat* (Planning a Theology for Layfolk). In that lies the beginning and the end, the source and the consummation, of all holiness.

3 Arising from that, in the third place, is the obvious and fundamental necessity of purifying our judgment of things, of our commitments, our joys, of all that is for us a 'having' and a possible source of enjoyment: family, money, position, power, health, etc. Above all is the necessity of revising and purifying our idea of ourselves, the idea we have of our own place and importance in the world. Not that all that needs 'purification,' on principle, as if it were bad in itself. But we must have all that 'as if we had it not.' We must reach the point of having it only from God and for him. The means of attaining this ideal is simple, there is only one: the cross. Ah, what tremendous truth there is in Leon Bloy's saying: 'Man's poor heart has parts which have not yet come to life, and there sorrow enters in to give them existence' (letter of 25 April 1873 to G. Landry). Such a role must be played in Christian living by purifications, and the difficulties of life can furnish us with the occasion and the means. I have children and I love them: they are handsome, intelligent, etc. Well and good. But for me to have them truly *from God*, I may be asked, if not, like Abraham, to sacrifice their lives, at least to perform some difficult and 'costing' act that will apparently oblige me to surrender that very thing which I believed I might lawfully enjoy. I will have to learn to have them, not for myself, but (for them and) for God. It will be the same for my health, my money, perhaps my reputation and my freedom. . . . We must be willing to pass through



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a tunnel to ensure that the light that is given us is *from God*, not of the flesh, to ensure that for us it may be a means of serving and an occasion for thanksgiving rather than for carnal enjoyment, however 'honourable.' Here we reach the heart of Christian living. It requires a second birth, and not only that of Baptism, which did not cost us much, but that of a real 'conversion,' that is to say, a radical revaluation of standards in our life. It will not work without the cross, or without those little sacrifices which St Teresa of Lisieux has taught us to understand better. Only if we do not neglect those very little things which precisely keep our will to live, not to ourselves, but to the Lord Jesus, awake and watching (cf. Rom. 6:10-11; 14:18), only then are we seriously training ourselves to enter that way of renunciation, that life through death, which is the way of the Lord Jesus. All that is far too sublime, it's unliveable: 'all right for saints!'

*The daily round.* No. That is, indeed, the way of real holiness—with or without a halo matters little. But this way is simple, and it can become the way of our daily life. It is simple because, as they say in scholastic philosophy, 'that does not add to the number' of our daily caravan of cares, duties or engagements. Fundamentally, what does it amount to? Quite simply to put all that, which we do like other people, in a new light and a new dimension. This light, this dimension, by making us see and take hold of all that as an expression of the will of God, enable us to live, not according to the flesh, and not only according to the world, but 'in the Lord' and for God. This they do from the mainspring of a detachment (the cross) and by virtue of all those spiritual aids which are given to us in the Church, which is the Communion of Saints.

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YVES M.-J. CONGAR, O.P.

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L. H. Grollenberg, O.P., *Atlas of the Bible*. Tr. and edited by Joyce M. H. Reid and H. H. Rowley. Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, Edinburgh 1956. Size 10½" × 14". pp. 166, maps 35, photographs over 400. 70s.

The significance of the title *Atlas of the Bible* has altered considerably during the past few years. In our school days an atlas was simply a collection of maps; illustrations and photographs of the countries we were studying had to be sought elsewhere, and they were usually all too few. But this magnificent book is first of all the Holy Land in pictures. When I say first of all I am being most unscholarly:

for surely no scholar would rank the photographs as more important than the text or maps. Yet I would hazard the guess that every scholar, on opening this atlas for the first time, has sat enthralled as he looked at photograph after photograph, and that only after he had seen them all did he, somewhat reluctantly, turn his attention to the maps and the text. In his introduction Fr de Vaux says that nothing can quite take the place of the personal experience of a visit to the Holy Land; but Fr Grollenberg gives us the next best thing, for his collection of photographs is more evocative of the Palestinian scene than any published before. The aerial photograph of the Jordan, for instance, must surely give a clearer impression of that strange region than any description; how many of us have thought of the 'desert of Judah' in term of the sands of the Sahara? These photographs correct this erroneous idea far more effectively than the efforts of teacher or textbook. Many of us, on reading that wadis are the dried-up beds of streams, have imagined them as little more than shallow trenches, strewn with pebbles. The photographs of Wadi el-Qelt and the Valley of the Kidron will make us realise how naïve we were. Yet another photograph will give us, perhaps for the first time, a true idea of what it is like to go down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and make us realise, too, how easy it was to suffer the fate of the good Samaritan. The view of snow-covered Hermon, of Tabor with the plain of Jezreel so clearly laid out at its foot, the Sea of Galilee with two fishermen in the foreground mending their nets, the alley in old Nazareth—one of the most beautiful pictures in the collection—and so many more: it is impossible to estimate the delight which this collection will give. But we cannot omit to mention the photographs of the Holy City itself. Aerial views bring into relief its situation, hemmed in on the east by the Kidron, and on the west and south by the Valley of Hinnom; we see, too, why the northern side was so vulnerable although the city was on a 'mountain.' We are shown details, at ground level, of the walls, the tombs in the valley, the Temple area, and there is a particularly striking photograph of the Mount of Olives. It would be impossible, I suppose, to satisfy the appetite stimulated by this collection, but it seems a pity that there are no photographs of street scenes which would help us to feel we were actually in the city, nor of such sacred spots as the Holy Sepulchre, the Via Dolorosa, nor the fascinating paved courtyard which some would regard as the Lithostroton (though not Fr Grollenberg, who, on his map of Jerusalem, places it at Herod's palace, at the present Jaffa Gate). There are also many photographs illustrating the civilisations of neighbouring peoples who in God's providence influenced Israel's history. It is a platitude to say that

the glories of ancient Egypt have to be seen to be believed ; but once more, this book brings us much nearer to appreciating them, with photographs which reveal the high level of Egyptian civilisation.

But it would be doing this book a grave injustice to give the impression that its value is to be assessed ultimately in its worth as a picture book. The text (which is more extensive than many might expect from the title) gives us an outline account of Israel's history, skilfully drawn, in which modern scholarship of the highest order is presented in a way which will attract the general reader. The table of contents itself, not usually a noteworthy page, gives a summary of that history which will prove most useful pedagogically, for the author has followed the example of the prophets in presenting the story of Israel as the life of a person, and he has set out the stages of this history under the headings of Birth and Infancy, Youth, Independence, Backsliding and Punishment, Reflection and Hope, Death and Resurrection. This story is preceded by introductory chapters on the Geographical Setting, the Technique of Biblical Geography, Excavations in Palestine and The Character of Biblical History. The reader will find these chapters most instructive : the special difficulties, for instance, which present themselves when we try to locate the enormous number of places mentioned in the Bible, and the uncertainty that must attach to many are points which are not always realised. Whilst the author avoids the use of question marks on the maps to indicate this uncertainty, it is noted for every Biblical site in the index. The short chapter on the character of Biblical History can only touch upon this important question, but how clearly and forcefully the problem is presented : ' Once certain Biblical writings had been classified as " historical " people unconsciously began to judge their content according to the standards expected of a work of history. Faith in their divine origin gave rise to the belief that the books of the Bible met the requirements of objectivity more completely than any other writings. Each one of the Bible stories must needs be the faithful presentation of a firm and substantial fact. . . . It was gradually realised that this approach did not correspond with reality. . . . In short, what interested an ancient Israelite was the *meaning of the event related* ; the question of exactly what happened in reality seemed to him somewhat strange and irrelevant.

It may seem odd that in reviewing this atlas, the maps should be the last thing to be mentioned, and mentioned, it must be confessed, with some slight cooling off in enthusiasm. They are highly informative, made doubly so by the explanatory notes included in them, which turn them into brief summaries of the history of each

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period. (Fr Grollenberg points out that explanatory notes are already found on the famous Madaba map.) But the pale colouring of the maps is drab; their different shades, indicative of various important facts, are sometimes difficult to distinguish; in fact, the maps are the only details in which this atlas resembles those of our schooldays. This is no more than a lack of attractiveness, for their value cannot be too highly estimated; and such a reaction is due to the contrast with the book as a whole, which is a truly magnificent production.

T. WORDEN

John E. Steinmueller and Kathryn Sullivan, *Catholic Biblical Encyclopedia*, Old and New Testaments. J. Wagner, New York 1956. pp. 1163; 679. £6.

After the publication of their *Encyclopedia of the New Testament* in 1950 it was hoped that the authors would continue and complete their labour with a similar work on the Old Testament. This they have done, and the result of their labours is now bound in this admirable volume. The work, unique of its kind, is primarily destined for non-specialists and will prove of immense value to priests and educated laity who are interested in the study of Sacred Scripture, but who have neither the time nor the means to consult works dealing with its various branches. Here they have at their disposal the results of sound and prolonged scientific research in all these branches, in a form which is readily accessible. The encyclopedia is a summary of up-to-date Catholic exegesis, and must be considered as having fulfilled the end for which it was intended.

The impressive number of articles (about 4,600 on the Old Testament and about 1,700 on the New Testament) is indicative of the comprehensiveness of the work. They deal with the people(s) and places of the Bible and with the principal questions of Biblical theology, liturgy and sociology. There is also a wealth of philological, historical, geographical and archaeological information which throws light on the sacred text. The language throughout is clear and concise, easily read and understood. The authors must be congratulated on their treatment of the various questions; their method is exegetical, not dogmatical as found in similar works in other languages.

Each book of the Bible is given a solid introduction, containing information on the author, background, purpose and content. The articles on the 'Pentateuch,' 'History of Israel,' 'Religion of Israel,' 'Archaeology' are worthy of particular mention—though the list might

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be prolonged. The alphabetical system employed is supplemented by adequate cross-references which obviate unnecessary repetitions. Other useful features include a list of titles of articles treated in both sections, phonetical indications, transliterations and translations of Hebrew and Greek names, maps, diagrams and photographs.

Naturally it is not exhaustive, however comprehensive; nor is it to be expected that everything proposed and adopted by the authors will meet with universal acceptance. Not everyone, for example, regarding the origin of the Pentateuch, will be content with the 'slight modifications' (p. 839) to the work of Moses; here and elsewhere more emphasis might have been placed on the phenomena of oral tradition. In the articles on 'Divorce' mention might have been made of the view defended in *Scripture*, VIII (1956), pp. 75-82. It might also be suggested that much of the material contained under the title 'Archaeology' should have been expanded and increased, and set under distinct titles; particularly the extra-Biblical texts which have a bearing on the sacred text, and which cannot be neglected by any serious student of the Bible.

These suggestions, however, do not detract from the intrinsic value of this work. Students of the Bible will be indebted to the authors for the laborious task of collecting such a vast amount of material into one volume. It should find its way into the library of every seminary. Used in conjunction with the *Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, it will prove an immense help to students. Unfortunately the price will place it beyond the access of those whom it would profit most.

T. HANLON

## BOOKS RECEIVED

(The mention of books in this list neither implies nor precludes subsequent review)

P. van Imschoot, *Theologie de L'Ancien Testament*, Tome II: L'Homme. Desclee, Tournai 1956. pp. 342. Price not stated.

John L. Murphy, *The Mass and Liturgical Reform*. Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee 1956. pp. 340. \$5.95.

*The New Testament*, tr. Ronald Knox, Burns & Oates, London 1956. pp. 592. 8s. 6d.



